

# Castlemaine Naturalist

March 2013

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Monthly newsletter of the  
Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.



Hooded Plovers, Pt Lonsdale Photo – Joy Weatherill

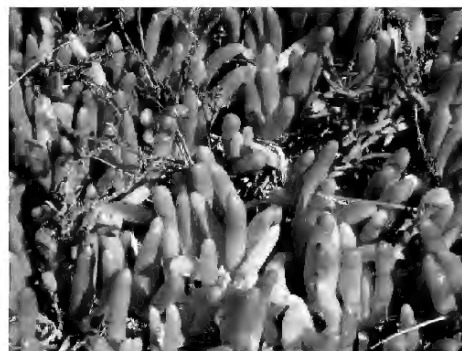
## Summer birding on the Bellarine Peninsula

Joy Weatherill

Thanks to members of Castlemaine Field Naturalists who kept me company at Point Lonsdale on the 15th, 16th and 17th February.

**Lake Victoria** is a wetland complex - a wildlife reserve managed by Parks Victoria, and forms part of a wetland corridor between Ocean Grove and Swan Bay.

Coast Wirilda (often bearing mistletoe), Coast Beard-heath and Coastal Moonah Woodland, give food and shelter to White-fronted Chats, Mistletoebirds, Fairy-wrens, and clumps of Prickly Spear grass and Chaffy Saw-sedge shelter Australian Spotted Crake and Red-kneed Dotterel. This area also has a great variety of saltmarsh plants - like Beaded Glasswort and Southern Sea heath.



Migratory birds coming from Siberia, start arriving in this area about mid November, and leave mid February - they can literally be there one evening and gone the next morning - except for about 100 who remain for whatever reason. Thankfully there were still a few thousand down at the Lake - mainly Red-necked Stints and Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, and a lot of Chestnut Teal. We listed nearly 20 varieties of bird, including Caspian Terns, Greenshanks and a lot of Red-capped Plovers, when we visited on the evening of the 14<sup>th</sup> of February.

The 100 or so Red-necked Avocets which had been around during January were not to be seen, and only a couple of Black-winged Stilts and no banded ones.

The smaller birds were nestling down in the bowl-like depressions left by the receding water - one bird per depression - and looked very cute. A couple of the Red-capped plovers were doing the 'broken wing act' to lead the predator (us) away.

We also visited **Lake Lorne** in Drysdale - another 20 varieties including Blue-billed duck and several Freckled duck. At **Edwards Point** Nature reserve we had a 10 minute competition to see how many different types of bivalve we could find - and came up with eight. Lots of Cormorants and a few Pelicans at **Swan Bay jetty**.

And at the surf beach at Point Lonsdale, some of the group were lucky enough to see the beautiful and rare Hooded Plover. [see cover photo and John Murray's article p6]

We all enjoyed the good company, wine, food and for a couple of people, some swimming.



Above left: Red capped Dotterel doing the broken wing act. Joy Weatherill

Above right: Observing at Lake Victoria – photo - George Broadway

Left: Silver Gull and Pacific Gull shadow a Pelican photo Noel Young

Below left: White Ibis and Royal Spoonbill photo - Joy Weatherill

Below right: Chestnut Teal male and female photo Noel Young

Opposite page: Spooning Spoonbills photo series - Joy Weatherill





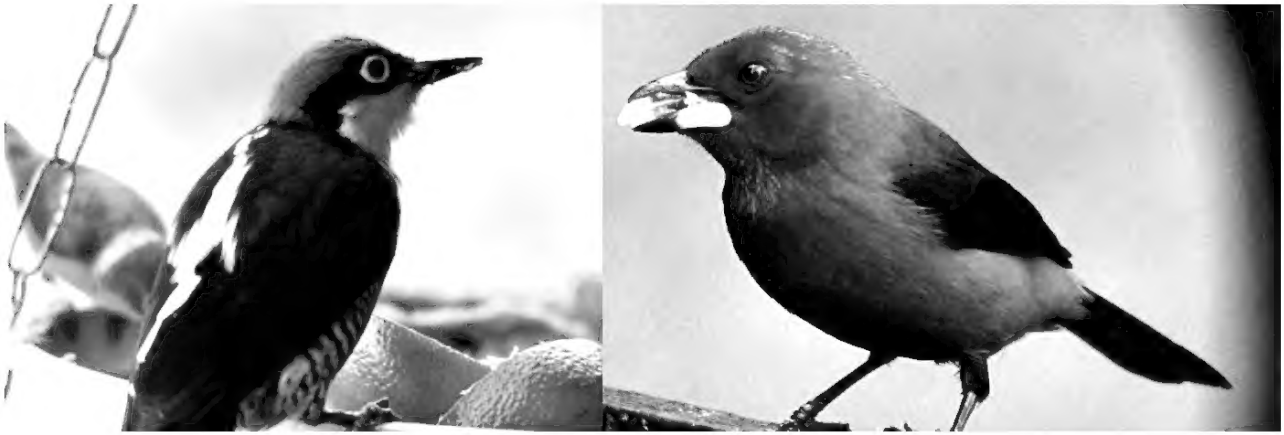
### **Panting on the Pantanal**

Well, they did say it was HOT. Late last year Nigel and Anne Harland went to Brazil lured by the Pantanal (Pantano= Portuguese for swamp), a large area which straddles the western border into Bolivia and Paraguay, a haven for wildlife and consisting of swamps, rivers, lakes and grassland. After the AGM Nigel gave us an entertaining talk illustrated with many wonderful photos taken on his visit. A few of these are reproduced here, though its a pity we cant show the spectacular colours of some of the birds.

Initially they were based on a paddle steamer houseboat on the Paraguay River, and travelled on a small open boat along the river each day, searching for the principle objective: the elusive Jaguar. It wasn't found until the day before they had to leave, but in the meantime Nigel managed to get photos of quite a number of the birds of the area; Woodpeckers, Toucans, Macaws, etc., and animals, many unique to this part of the world such as the Giant River Otter, the Caiman (crocodile) and the Capybara, the worlds largest rodent but cute nonetheless. The Capybara is prey to the Jaguar, so the rodent generally stays close to the water for a quick escape. This is convenient for the observer, who can see both from a boat. The jungle beside the river is often impenetrable, but the Jaguar tends to rest on the bank.

By coincidence, SBS showed a documentary on this unique area on 27<sup>th</sup> February, as part of the 'Wildest Latin America' series, bringing to life many of the creatures shown by Nigel and Anne.

- Noel Young



Above: Yellow-fronted Woodpecker and Silver-beaked Tanager



Above: Sunbittern and Agami Heron

Below: The charismatic Hyacinth Macaw, world's largest parrot







Giant River Otter

A Cattle Egret takes  
a ride on a Capybara



The third largest cat-  
the beautiful Jaguar



# Life's a Beach and then you fly ... fingers crossed

By John Murray

There's lots of "chick monitoring" on Point Lonsdale back beach and every stretch of summer coastline all the way to Ipanema where the girl is from. So what's new?

A tiny fluff ball of cuteness on powerful legs!

On January 14, a single hooded plover chick hatched from a three-egg nest on Point Lonsdale surf beach.

The other two eggs failed because they baked in the hot sand after the encroaching public forced the parent off its simple beach-scape nest for too long. On hot days the viable egg temperature must be maintained by the breeding pair frequently wetting their bellies in the cool shallows before alternating egg incubation. Considering the prolonged human disturbance on the recent 40 degree scorcher it is a miracle one egg survived.

At two days old the parents escorted their vulnerable chick one kilometre west to where it now scampers over the upper and lower beach and exposed reef, foraging constantly. If it survives the 35-day flightless chick phase through to Feb 18 it will then be full grown and able to fly. But that's a big if. In the past seven years of monitoring Point Lonsdale's only pair of endangered beach-nesting hoodies, just one chick has survived from approximately 50 eggs.

Three other breeding pairs nests along the beach towards Collendina/Ocean Grove.

Hooded plover habitat is south-east Australian surf beaches with offshore reefs where seaweed grows. When dead seaweed washes up onto the shore and decomposes it is colonised by protein rich sand hoppers - the primary diet of Hooded Plovers. Hoodies have evolved on the narrow sand ribbon between sea and land over who knows how long? Birds have been around for 150 million years. It would be unthinkable to force this unique coastal icon into extinction.

John Murray is a Bird Life Australia volunteer. Visit [www.birdlife.org.au/beach](http://www.birdlife.org.au/beach)

[reproduced from The Rip courtesy of John Murray]

## Some observations in North Castlemaine during a hot, dry January

by Denis Hurley

**Jan 1, 2013:** Around 11.30 am, Yellow-faced Honeyeaters – three chicks from a nest in *Melaleuca nesophila* have moved from the nest to a branch under shade of the verandah – smart! At 2.50 pm – parent moved chicks to a 3m high *Photinia* near the car port – better shade, closer to water. They and four Red-browed Finches stayed here for several days.

**Jan 7:** Two Magpies and a Grey Currawong used cool draught and shade at the front of the house.

**Jan 11 noon:** Four Red-browed Finch chicks in the *Photinia* – may be from a nest on the drive 100m away

**Jan 14:** Marbled Gecko on lounge floor – 75 mm long. Looked tired so I released it in cool moist shade near the back door.

**Jan 19:** Pair of White-browed Scrubwrens in dusty dry area under the house. Seem to be feeding on something?

**Jan 22:** Blue banded Bees: 2 – 4 seen working on Basil flowers and Buddleia (purple blooms) in pots, and *Agapanthus* in the garden.

**Jan 27:** Black Wallaby crossing the property (east to west)

**Jan 29:** Two Blue banded Bees seen buzz-pollinating a *Dianella amoena* (regular visits)

### From the business meeting

Membership forms are enclosed with this newsletter. If the number on your address label ends in '2-13', then subs are due. Fees are the same as last year.

Last month's field trip was cancelled due to total fire ban. We will try again this month

#### Requests received

The **Victorian National Parks Association** is requesting donations to help the fight for stronger native habitat protection in the light of State Govt. policy changes proposed to make it much easier to remove native vegetation. For more information: [www.vnpa.org.au](http://www.vnpa.org.au)

### Observations

- ◆ At the February meeting -
- ◆ On the way to the meeting, Denis Hurley observed two White-faced Herons fighting over a small dam in Lyttleton st. He then related how a Red Wattlebird, prior to christmas, was driving other birds away from his flowering Eremophilas. When it eventually left, a pair of Yellow-faced Honeyeaters built a nest in a Melaleuca at the back door and have successfully fledged three chicks.
- ◆ Phee told how all four goldfish disappeared from her small pond, apparently to the benefit of a White-faced Heron. And many of us could relate to her encounters with Sulphur-crested Cockatoos slyly and persistently stripping a tree of berries despite efforts to discourage them with the hose.
- ◆ Chris Timewell placed a bird bath outside the kitchen window which seemed only to attract blackbirds and sparrows, but he recently witnessed a sparrow fall victim to a **Collared Sparrowhawk**, which proceeded to eat its prey in full view, allowing a positive identification. And a raptor seen in the Barkers Ck area was probably the dark morph of a Little Eagle
- ◆ Rita has noted mixed feeding flocks going through again, with Sittellas amongst Brown Thornbills and Silvereyes
- ◆ Nigel Harland spotted a **Noisy Friarbird** at 6.15 on the meeting night at his place in Sutton Grange. Now very uncommon in the area, it is interesting to note that it was commonly reported in the fifties in the records of the Sutton Grange school.
- ◆ Late February -
- ◆ Chris Timewell counted 10 **White throated Needletails** at 7.30pm, two days before the last storms came through
- ◆ An Echidna has taken up residence under the house; and White browed Babblers seen at Newstead on 9<sup>th</sup> February – Rita
- ◆ Two Varied Sittellas seen at home – Barbara Geurin

**Disclaimer:** The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

# Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme

## March 2013

**Fri March 8 meeting:** speaker KERRY HERMAN –  
"Searching for the Kulawi (Red-throated Lorikeet)"

**Sat March 9 field trip:** Newstead area\*  
\*normal time at Duke st., or meet up at the Rotunda Park,  
Newstead at 1.50pm

**Fri April 12 meeting:** speaker STEVE WILLIAMS -  
"Caterpillars to moths"

### VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

**General meetings** - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.

**Field Trips** - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

**Business meetings** - fourth Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 7.30 pm. Members are invited to attend.

### Subscriptions for 2013

Ordinary membership: Single \$30, Family \$40

Pensioner or student: Single \$25, Family \$30

Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

### 2013 Committee

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